

**TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
June 9, 2020
6:30 p.m.**

CALL TO ORDER: President Bella called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

INVOCATION

MOMENT OF SILENCE – After the Invocation President Bella asked all to remain standing for a moment of silence. This is to show our solidarity for what is happening now across the country, including over 109,000 coronavirus deaths, and the tragic death of George Floyd while in police custody. Councilman Spann asks President Bella for the second moment of silence. Councilman Hardaway asks for the third moment of silence. Councilman Minchuk asks for the fourth moment of silence. Councilwoman Uzelac asks for the fifth moment of silence. Councilman Pettit asks for the sixth moment of silence. Vice-President White asks for the seventh moment of silence. Madam Clerk-Treasurer Kelly White Gibson then asks for everyone to continue standing for the eighth moment of silence. Lastly, President Bella asks everyone to remain standing for an additional forty-six seconds of silence.

President Bella thanks everyone for participating. “On behalf of the Merrillville Town Council, Clerk-Treasurer and all associated with Merrillville town government we wanted to show our solidarity this evening along with fellow brothers and sisters across our nation, while we grieve not only the over 109,000 United States deaths due to the coronavirus pandemic, but also due to the tragic and senseless death of George Floyd as well as others like him. Our moments of silence tonight represent the 8 minutes and 46 seconds that led to Mr. Floyd’s death while in police custody in Minneapolis, Minnesota. We look forward to reforms that will stop these irrational incidents that plague our nation”.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL: Roll Call taken by Madam Clerk Treasurer White Gibson. Present were, Councilman Spann, Councilman Hardaway, Councilman Minchuk, Councilwoman Uzelac, Councilman Pettit, Vice President White, and President Bella.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REMONSTRATIONS:

Police Chief Cuttino makes an announcement to the public on behalf of the Merrillville Police Department due to the tragic death of George Floyd. Letter reads, “Due to the wake of the recent tragic incident, I would like to speak to the public. George Floyd’s incidents and events that follow are things I never want to see happen again, in this Country and definitely not in the Town of Merrillville. It’s damaging to the relationship and trust between the public and police. I want to do my part to help. Therefore, I give you, the Town of Merrillville, my word that I will do everything within my power to be sure proper policies are put in place so that our officers get properly trained to handle situations properly from a physical standpoint but to also recognize when something has gone wrong. I want my officers to know that they will have the power to intervene regardless of rank, if they feel an injustice has occurred. Thank you.”

President Bella asks the Chief to remain standing for swearing-in.

Madam Clerk-Treasurer Kelly White Gibson swears in the new Police Chief Wiley Luther Cuttino and Assistant Police Chief Konstantinos Nuses.

President Bella congratulates Chief Cuttino and Assistant Chief Nuses. He looks forward to their great work ahead.

A letter from Town Engineering Administrator endorsing Core Construction’s recommendation to approve payment for application #5 to various vendors for work completed at the Merrillville Community Center in the amount of \$1,117,134.22. Motion to approve by Councilman Pettit, seconded by Councilman Minchuk. Voice Vote 7.0. The motion carries.

President Bella read a letter from the Saint Andrews Women’s Club. Letter reads, “Dear Mr. Bella, I thank you for the communication regarding the Safe Haven Baby Box. We are hopeful that this donation helps to get this goal accomplished in a timely manner. We appreciate and are grateful for this worthy endeavor. Sincerely, Saint Andrews Women’s Club.” A check in the amount of \$1,000 has been donated to the Safe Haven Baby Box.

CONSENT AGENDA

Accts. Payable Register Voucher Approval for June 9, 2020
Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of May 26, 2020

Motion to approve consent agenda made by Councilwoman Uzelac, seconded by Councilman Pettit. The motion passed with a 7-0 voice vote.

STANDING COMMITTEES

BUDGET & FINANCE – Vice President White- Will begin working on the Town's budget with the Clerk Treasurer.

PUBLIC WORKS- Councilman Minchuk- There were no reports.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS- Councilwoman Uzelac- There were no reports.

PERSONNEL POLICY & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS- Councilwoman Uzelac- Several meetings have taken place. Most importantly, a meeting appointing the new Police Chief took place at the last personnel policy meeting.

PUBLIC SAFETY- Councilman Minchuk- Stated that he believes both the new Police Chief and Assistant Police Chief will be great additions and very beneficial to the town of Merrillville. Councilman Minchuk thanks both for their service. He also thanks Chief Petruch for his assistance with training the new Police Chief.

President Bella adds that the Council has been talking about a proper sendoff for both Chief Petruch and Assistant Chief Donohue and he looks forward to doing that at a future meeting, hopefully in July.

PARKS & RECREATION- Councilwoman Uzelac stated that due to the excessive rain public works and parks have been slower than usual with grass mowing. She would like to make the public aware that grass mowing will start back up soon.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- Vice President White stated that he worked with the State, Government and the Health department to get COVID-19 testing sites for the Town of Merrillville. Currently the dates and times are June 11th-14th from 9am- 6pm. Please be advised that all persons must have an Indiana State ID.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & CENSUS 2020- Councilman Pettit asks the residents to please go online to do the Census. This is extremely important to the Town of Merrillville and having an accurate count helps the Town receive funding for streets, roads, drainage etc.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – Councilman Pettit announces that the Redevelopment meeting will be held immediately following tonight's council meeting. Also, Fieldhouse project updates were provided to the Council. Councilman Pettit stated that a resolution on tonight's agenda to the Town Council is the third step in a fourth step process to separate the Fieldhouse property from Ameriplex at the Crossings creating it's mini TIF districts. Therefore, when the Redevelopment Commission acts on this June 23rd it will then be finalized. The Town manager and Town attorney will then prepare a request for proposals to purchase the building. The proceeds from the sale will pay off a \$950,000 debt the Town has and the remaining money will be set aside as the operating seed money for the community center that plans to open March 1, 2021.

Councilwoman Uzelac asks Councilman Pettit to explain the \$950, 000 debt to the public that the Town owes.

Councilman Pettit explains that about 6-7 years ago the Town was approached by a korean pharmaceutical company that wanted to manufacture a self contained IV bag, and wanted business in Merrillville because of the Town's proximity to I-65 and to Chicago Hospitals. They targeted the old Fieldhouse building which was built by a private individual named Mark Laten and included about 8 basketball courts. At that time the Redevelopment Commission decided to take out a bond issue and pair that up with \$1.5 million dollars worth of certified tech park money that the Town received and the Town bought the building for \$3.2 million dollars. The Town flipped the building to the Purdue research foundation which owns property at Ameriplex at the Crossroads, they continued to pay property taxes on the building and they were going to lease it to the korean pharmaceutical company but unfortunately, the korean pharmaceutical company could not get their funding and the Town had been paying down the bond issue with the the property taxes that Purdue were paying to the Town of Merrillville. Due to the korean pharmaceutical company not being able to get their funding, part of the agreement was that Purdue would return the building to the Town of Merrillville. Mr. Svetanoff handled the closing. The Town currently owns the Fieldhouse building with an outstanding debt in the amount of \$950,000 along with other debt associated with the Broadway TIF District.

Vice President White made a motion for the Town to pay the \$950,000 debt. Secondly, an additional \$700,000 towards the first year operation of the community center. The remaining funds should be given back to the Town to take other debt into consideration.

Councilwoman Uzelac asked Councilman Pettit, after the debt is paid, can the remaining money come back into the Town Fund? Councilman Pettit stated no, that Tom Pittman set it up so that after payment of the \$950,000 debt the remaining money will have to return back to Broadway TIF or be used for the operating of the community center. The operating estimated budget per year for the community center ranges between \$600,000-\$750,000, depending on utilities, supplies etc.

Councilman Uzelac asked, will there be police security at the community center? Councilman Pettit stated that the Council will work with the Police Chief on how to handle police security.

Vice President White retracted his motion.

UTILITY LIAISONS- Councilman Spann- There is no report.

ABANDONED PROPERTIES- Vice President White thanks the department of Code Enforcement for making some real progress and improvements in his ward. Two buildings that were burnt out are now being worked on for selling. Secondly, the building on Taff Street that has been covered with tarps, the owner has been contacted and has agreed to make repairs. Vice President White thanks Tiffany and Vickie of Code Enforcement for getting this taken care of. Thirdly, there are two abandoned properties on 57th Harrison that he believes this to have been an old gas station that needs to be addressed by the abandoned property committee.

Pat spoke to the Carriage House Demo. Bid specifications have been publicized and the Town is anticipating receiving bids. At the end of this month a special meeting will be requested of the Redevelopment Commission with hopes of making a recommendation on an award. There is a deadline at the end of July to invoice Lake County for the funds. Pat has had a conversation with Bob Swintz about identifying other dollars that are uncommitted that could be used if the demolition exceeds the amount of money granted from Lake County. Pat thanks Steven King for his help. Town Atty. Svetanoff continues to work hard with Lake County in helping the Town get ownership of the third parcel immediately west of the two parcels the Town owns at 76th & Madison Street. The two best options are receiving direct deed ownership from the owner or ownership from Lake County from a tax sale. The third option is to receive the property through a tax sale certificate, which can take up to six months for the Town to receive ownership. However, this option will allow the Town to reapply for community block grant money.

TOWN IDENTITY & BEAUTIFICATION- Councilwoman Uzelac stated that she has had no meetings due to COVID-19. She hopes to resume the meeting in July.

Vice President White stated that the Governor signed a new legislation, 566-2019 named residential housing and TIF District and he would like to get curbs, sidewalks, roads and lighting (beautification) done in his district.

Councilwoman Uzelac advises Vice President White that this matter will be up for discussion at the next Town Identity & Beautification meeting in July.

COMMUNITY & RECREATION CENTER – Councilmen Minchuk & Pettit- Motion by Councilman Pettit, seconded by Councilman Minchuk to amend Structure Point contract to include the \$13,000 for the kitchen design change at the community center. All in favor. The motion carries. Also, Councilman Pettit made a motion to approve the Sports Field Crowning funds in the amount of \$3,000 to the Structure Point contract. Councilman Minchuk seconded the motion. All in favor. The motion carries.

DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT- Jan Orlich, Director of Parks & Recreation- Jan and Kevin met and public works will soon start installation of Crescent Lake Park. Also, Forest Hills Park is closed due to a sinkhole. Stormwater has been notified.

Steven King, Town's Engineer, mentioned constituents' concerns of street pavements. Mr. King stated that the Town's street paving process was explained to the constituent.

Pat Reardon, Town Manager read a letter from Tim Brown, Executive Director of Lake County Community Economic Development Department awarding the Town up to \$16,765 in COVID-19 cares funding including purchases backdated to March 30, 2020 are eligible for reimbursement provided the funds were specifically use to prevent, prepare and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

GENERAL ORDERS- NONE

ORDINANCES

FIRST READINGS (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)

Ordinance 20-10 (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)

An Ordinance amending Ordinance Nos. 72-15: 87-22; and 88-, and repealing all Town Code sections and Ordinances, or parts thereof, in conflict with. Motion approved by Vice President White, seconded by Councilman Spann. 6-0. 1 Abstention. Motion carries.

SECOND READINGS

RESOLUTIONS (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)

Resolution 20-19

A Resolution of the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Indiana, approving certain amendments to the Declaratory Resolution and Economic Development Plan for the Broadway Economic Development Area, and related matters. Motion by Councilman Pettit, seconded by Councilwoman Uzelac. All in favor. The motion carries.

BZA ACTIONS

Petitioner: Landmark Sign Group
Owner: Bricklayers Union
Request: Variance of Use Approval
Purpose: To Allow a LED Message Center
Location: 7985 Marshall Street
Zoning: C-3 Highway Commercial Zoning district
Case:# Z6Uv3-0520

Motion to approve by Councilman Pettit, seconded by Councilwoman Uzelac. Voice Vote 7.0. The motion carries.

Petitioner: Town of Merrillville
Owner: Town of Merrillville
Request: Variance of Use Approval
Purpose: To Allow a LED Electronic Message Center
Location: 6600-6680 Broadway
Zoning: C-3 Highway Commercial Zoning District
Case:# Z12Uv4-0520

Motion to approve by Councilman Minchuk, seconded by Councilman Pettit. Voice Vote 7.0. The motion carries.

OLD BUSINESS- NONE

NEW BUSINESS- NONE

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Charles
518 W. 76th Avenue, Merrillville, IN

There is a house at 554 W. 76th Ave. that he believes to be a drug house. The builder knows and the police have been contacted but nothing has been done. Mr. Charles has left voice messages with the police department and has called the drug hotline as well. Constituent is concerned about his daughter's safety, because she rides her bike past this home. Constituent is also concerned about the stop sign at 76 & Madison Street, there's a hill there and vehicles are unable to see the stop sign until it's too late to stop. A stop sign is not enough!

Pastor Sims
Former President of the Coalition of Pastors
Merrillville resident of Sedona Housing

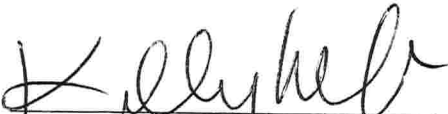
Pastor Sims congratulates the new Police Chief. He would like to express his concerns about what's going in the country and the killing of George Floyd, whose funeral was just finalized. He wants to know where the Town of Merrillville stands when it comes to Black Lives Matter? Pastor Sims stated that he has not seen a BLM sign nor has he heard a statement from the Town. He too has been a victim of police racism in the past. Pastor Sims stated that he has a black son and wants to know that he is safe. There are over 44.4 percent of blacks who reside in Merrillville and he wants something on record from the Town.

ANNOUNCEMENTS- The next Town Council Meeting is June 23rd at 6:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT – Councilwoman Uzelac made a motion to adjourn at 7:35 p.m. All in favor. The motion carries.



Rick Bella, President



Kelly White Gibson, Clerk Treasurer